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AUTHOR Hale, Phale D.; Maynard, Larry O.
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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews research on pupil recruitment strategies and admission policies for magnet programs and their impact on equal access. It is also based, in part, on a survey of 56 magnet school administrators whose programs are funded by the Magnet Schools Assistance Program. The paper is divided into six main sections. Section 1 discusses magnet school information dissemination strategies generally, focusing on these issues: (1) who should be responsible for information dissemination; (2) commonly used types of dissemination strategies; (3) the effectiveness of these strategies in informing potential students; and (4) how to best target the dissemination effort. Section 2 describes the limitations of needs assessment surveys. Section 3 presents a sample information dissemination/recruitment plan which shows how plans can be shaped to respond to particular objectives. Section 4 focuses on the role of building-based staff in the recruitment process. It advises that program planners avoid making school staffs feel that their best students are being "skimmed off." Section 5 provides an overview of the variety of student selection criteria used by magnet schools, and focuses on the most common object, equal access. The most commonly used criteria are racial balance, academic ability, ability in curricular area of magnet, location of residence, and interest. Conclusions are presented in Section 6, which describes how equity problems in admissions policy can arise after a magnet school attracts a particular population. (KH)

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EFFECTIVE INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES FOR MAGNET SCHOOLS

Phale D. Hale
Supervising Director
Budget and Resource Allocation

Larry O. Maynard
Supervising Director
School and Business Alliance

Rochester City School District
131 West Broad Street
Rochester, New York 14614

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EFFECTIVE INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES FOR MAGNET SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Although magnet schools have have been used extensively in the United States as a mechanism for desegregating public education, little has been published on pupil recruitment strategies and admission policies for magnet programs (Blank, 1986) and their impact on equal access.

This paper will attempt to examine these issues by reviewing information dissemination strategies currently being used to inform potential choosers of their choice options, identifying and discussing those strategies which appear to be effective, and examining magnet school admission policies. Many school districts with magnet schools are conducting recruitment strategies with considerable success. Many more, however, are isolated and not aware of the successful strategies that have been developed by others. During the initial stages of magnet program development, the level of accessibility of special magnets to all students is sometimes impaired by the attempt to design magnets which are attractive to special groups.

This paper is intended to serve as a stimulus for further discussion and study of the critical magnet school issues outlined above. The research is based in part on a survey, conducted by the authors, of 56 magnet school administrators whose programs are funded by the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP). The school districts represented ranged in size from 9,300 students to 680,000. Each city had an average of 3 magnet schools with 22 being the highest number and 1 being the lowest. (See Appendix for further description of methodology.)

MAGNET SCHOOL INFORMATION DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES

Who Should be Responsible for Information Dissemenation?

Before identifying the most commonly used information dissemination strategies and methods of reaching parents and students, it is important to discuss who is generally responsible for designing and implementing the information dissemination plan. The most common approach has been to rely heavily upon the magnet school central administrative staff to conduct the design and implementation stages of information dissemination. Evidence suggests, however, that this is not necessarily the most effective approach. While the MSAP practitioners generally agree that a central magnet school information department should be responsible for the actual marketing plan of the overall magnet program, several other components are critical. Involvement and support from a district's public relations or parent and community involvement office is often essential to the plan because the effort frequently requires major changes in the way school systems provide information to the public and the level of information provided by non-magnet schools. The overall organization of the system as well as the existing information dissemination strategies used in the system, should be considered when preparing a magnet schools recruitment plan. Magnet school practitioners agree that while the central magnet school information department should have overall responsibility for marketing, each magnet site should manage its own marketing plan with support from the central office.

Educational personnel are not necessarily in time with the pulse of the community and may not be adept in the use of successful marketing techniques. The MSAP survey results show that educators' perceptions of what parents look for in selecting a school are not necessarily in agreement with marketing experts' findings. One interpretation of the data is that the use of private sector marketing agencies may be the most effective approach for districts that

are just beginning to implement a magnet plan. It may be advisable for districts that are in the initial phases of magnet school development and recruitment to contract with a professional marketing agency to assist with the plan. The initial cost may seem high, yet a trial and error process of information dissemination by local educators may only end up being more costly in the long run, and more importantly, actually impede the attainment of magnet school recruitment goals.

What Types of Information Dissemination Strategies are Commonly Used?

An analysis of survey questionnaires filled out by administrators from 56 school districts currently implementing MSAP programs has revealed the most commonly used information dissemination strategies to attract students to magnet schools used by their districts to be the local media, formal and informal meetings with organized parent groups and neighborhood parents, mailings of printed materials to students and parents, recruitment visits to schools, peer recruitment activities, school open houses, "word-of-mouth," and recruitment booths at shopping malls.

Other types of information dissemination strategies which are used by districts to a somewhat lesser degree have included:

1. Dissemination of printed materials describing magnet school options to:
   - Local real estate agencies
   - Private nurseries, daycare centers, and preschools
   - Public libraries
   - Public housing authority offices
   - Youth Centers (e.g., YMCA/YWCA, youth groups)
   - Civic groups
2. A telephone informational hot line (e.g., "dial-a-tape")

3. Telephone recruitment

4. Video tapes/discs disseminated to target groups

5. Distribution of bumper stickers and T-shirts advertising magnets

6. Advertisements on city buses and billboards

7. Calendars publicizing application dates

8. Speakers Bureaus of magnet school supporters including: parents, students, teachers, special staff, community leaders.

How Effective are these Strategies in Informing Potential Choosers?

Essentially, all magnet school information dissemination strategies can be construed as "publicity campaigns" for marketing of the magnet program. It should be obvious that no matter how popular, or seemingly effective a particular strategy is, the product itself, the magnet school, is the key factor in the "sale." On the other hand, a highly effective school may not draw the target population it is striving to attract if potential students and their parents are not aware of the program.

Analysis of the magnet schools survey results and a review of available literature leads to the conclusion that there is no single strategy that is effective for every school district, and while some strategies are effective for one district, those same strategies may be totally ineffective for another. Every district must use a unique combination of information dissemination techniques. The most effective information dissemination strategy is the one that reaches and informs the maximum number of potential choosers. Therefore, each school district must know specifically who those potential choosers are before it can select the best strategy for its recruitment effort.

Targeting the Information Dissemination Effort

The first general category of choosers to reach are parents, since it is the parents who are the primary decision-makers in the selection of their child's school until the child reaches high school. As potential magnet school

students get older, peers have a great deal more influence on their choice of magnets. Teenagers have a tendency to choose the schools their friends choose. Most district recruitment materials reviewed by the authors have tended to be oriented toward parents, even at the high school level. School districts, however, should be cautious in orienting recruitment materials to students. It has been our experience that materials and ads specifically designed to attract students may tend to upset adults. Themes using rock music or other popular interests of teenagers are sometimes not well-received by parents. It is quite a bit less controversial and safer to use recruitment themes that target parents as recipients of information.

Knowing the importance of focusing information dissemination efforts on parents, it must be determined specifically who the potential parent "choosers" are, where they are located, and where you need their children to improve racial balance. The size of the school district and the demographics of the pool of potential choosers are key factors to consider when selecting a strategy. For example, our MSAP Survey results show that 75% of the districts with enrollments over 40,000 students believe that dissemination of printed materials mailed to the homes of students was the single most effective part of their strategy, whereas districts with enrollments under 40,000 students cited newspaper advertisements as their single most effective tool. All parents, regardless of race or class, want a "good" school for their children, yet different communities and different groups within the community may use differing criteria for selecting a school. For example, MSAP Survey data indicate that program selection criteria differ slightly depending on the size of district: staff in small districts believe parents consider curricular emphasis before they consider location, whereas in the larger districts, staff perceive location to be a more important choice factor than curricular

emphasis. No matter what the district size, however, respondents agreed that social reputation (i.e. extracurricular and/or social activities) is the least significant factor influencing program choice.

Determining what criteria parents use in selecting a school should guide the design of recruitment materials. Information should be organized to emphasize the school features which parents consider particularly important. Printed material that is mailed to students' and parents' homes should be expressly tailored to the needs and desires of the target audiences. Letters and brochures should be written in clear, concise language which all parents can easily understand. Educational jargon which may be confusing should be avoided and the materials should be written in the parents' native language whenever possible. Strong emphasis should be placed on considering the characteristics of the target audiences. Are the intended information recipients Hispanic, black, Asian, white, private/parochial school parents, or suburban? Once the potential groups of choosers have been identified, the information should be specifically tailored for and disseminated to those groups.

After assessing the number and type of choosers to be reached and determining where they are located, district staff should determine what financial and human resources will be available to develop and implement a viable recruitment plan. Cost factors will significantly influence the kinds of strategies to be used.

Marketing research has found that, generally, it takes at least <u>three</u> contacts with a potential chooser in an appropriate target group to make up his or her mind regarding the selection of a particular program. Statistics for continuing education programs show that there are peak periods in the time schedule for program registrations. Currently, there is no similar data available for magnet schools which could be used to develop a practical information

dissemination plan that provides the three or more contacts. An April target date, however, for school selection seems to be the most common one used by districts, as it allows adequate time for informing parents, staff planning, and, if it involves recruiting students from outside the district (i.e., private school students), it takes into account other options in-selection deadlines that parents and students may have.

Results of the MSAP survey done for this research show that districts with enrollments under 40,000 students generally have found the strategies listed in the first column below to be most effective (in order of most effective to least effective); the survey results of districts over 40,000 are listed in the second column.

Districts UNDER 40,000

1. Newspapers
2. Meeting with organizations and parent groups
3. Printed materials mailed to students/parents at their home address
4. School "open houses"
5. Distribution of printed materials in non-magnet schools
6. Visits by recruiters to non-magnet schools
7. Peer recruitment
8. Television
9. Radio
10. Neighborhood "Kaffee klatches" or other informational personal contact
11. Recruitment booths at shopping malls

Districts OVER 40,000

1. Printed materials mailed to students/parents at their home address
2. Printed materials mailed to students in non-magnet schools
3. Newspapers
4. Meetings with organizations and parent groups
5. School "open houses"
6. Visits by recruiters to non-magnet schools
7. Peer recruitment
8. Television
9. Radio
10. Neighborhood "Kaffee klatches" or other informational personal contact

These information dissemination methods are only effective when implemented as part of a well-orchestrated design with carefully chosen timelines as well as target audiences. In examining the techniques used most frequently in districts under 40,000, newspapers are noted as the single most effective tool, yet further clarification is necessary because newspapers can include a wide variety of readers and even in smaller cities, there is often more than one newspaper.

A district should examine the degree of appropriateness the various local newspapers have to the targeted chooser (e.g. ethnic press, labor press, shopper's guides, suburban press, special community-based press). Magnet schools information specialists questioned by the researchers expressed the opinion that positive news and feature stories about magnet school programs and events provided a more effective way of using newspapers to reach choosers than relying on paid advertisements. Therefore, experience suggests that recruiters should develop contacts with representatives of local print media to create greater awareness of, and interest in, magnet options.

The evidence on information dissemination and recruitment for magnet schools clearly stresses how essential the support and commitment of the school board and district leadership is to the success of their magnet programs (Blank, 1986). This is hardly a surprising finding, yet there have been instances where lack of support from these key groups can seriously erode the effectiveness of even the most well-developed information dissemination plan. For example, one district's magnet schools director interviewed by the the researcher was deluged with phone calls from parents who were upset about a front-page newspaper quote from a school board member who had said that the district was financially unable to support any new magnets. According to the respondent, financial support was <u>not</u> really an issue for continuing existing

magnets or adding new ones. The magnet schools director further stated that, as a result of the board member quote, several parents withdrew applications and that he was concerned about the impact the article would have on future applicants.

LIMITATIONS OF NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

Specialists in magnet program development put great emphasis on conducting needs assessments. These assessments typically involve the use of questionnaires which most frequently illicit the kinds of information educational personnel want to hear rather than determining what the school community really wants. The fact that 95% of parents surveyed might say that they would be interested in sending their children to a technology magnet does not mean that 95% of them would actually enroll their children in that school. Further, a response by a small but dedicated minority who would actually enroll their children in the program could be easily overlooked or discounted. Finally, surveys are often designed as if a district has no history and they sometimes fail to account for all the important variables that affect choice. Marketing research shows that some of the pitfalls in the use of non-professionally-developed needs assessments are:

- Surveys are often written in a way that produces results which are biased.
- Certain kinds of people fill out questionnaires, others do not (i.e., active vs. passive choosers).
- Often, people tell those who administer surveys what they want to hear.
- Persons who are dissatisfied are more apt to answer questionnaires that those who are satisfied.

A good example of this emerged in the analysis of the survey of magnet school administrators used for this research. Respondents to this instrument

agreed that parents choose a school primarily based upon the academic reputation of the school, whereas surveys of parents show that, generally, parents use non-instructional criteria in choosing programs. Further, administrators from cities over and under 40,000 cited school location as the second and third most important factor respectively affecting selection, but school location was cited as the primary criterion for most families (Bridge and Blackman, 1978).

Survey responses from magnet school directors and available literature suggest that several components make up an effective information dissemination system. Prior to designing an information dissemination plan, parents should be surveyed to determine the kinds of magnet schools they want for their children. Magnet programs that are developed should reflect the interests of parents.

A SAMPLE CASE STUDY OF A DISSEMINATION AND RECRUITMENT PLAN

In the following pages, a sample information dissemination/recruitment plan is presented and discussed in order to illustrate a combination of strategies that are likely to produce the most successful results.

Background

School district "A" is located in a northeast urban setting with an enrollment of 39,000 students. Its minority population is 66%; of these students, 50% are black, 12% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 34% white, and 1% "other." District "A" has two existing magnet schools; these magnets are successful in attracting students and are racially balanced, yet district planners have identified three key concerns they want to address in their recruitment plan for the ten new magnets they have recently planned. These are:

1. To increase the number of Hispanic students enrolling in magnets.
2. To increase the number of white students enrolling/re-enrolling in district schools.
3. To increase the number of low-achieving black students who apply to magnets.

The existing magnets are well-established and have enjoyed a good reputation within the community for over five years. Because of their popularity it has not been necessary to implement any special recruitment strategies to attract students other than by word-of-mouth.

The newly-developed magnets embody a rigorous academic approach and each was carefully designed to provide the community with programs which parents had identified as being needed or wanted. Following is the information dissemination plan employed by District "A" to recruit students to the new magnets.

Pool of Potential Choosers

District "A" wanted to draw enrollment from all school-age children in the city as well as attract some white suburban students. Board of Education policy allowed 10% of each magnet school's population to be opened to suburban students on the condition that all city students had first choice and suburban students would only fill vacancies that existed after all city students were placed. Therefore, the district's pool of potential choosers was the entire parent and school-age population of the metropolitan area: 860,000. Since planners had several "subgroups" they specifically wanted to reach, they knew they would have to design a plan that was effective for both the general population as well as specific targeted groups. With the assistance of consultants from a local marketing firm, the district determined the special needs of the three targeted subgroups that they specifically wanted to reach and suggestions were made for reaching them.

Recruitment Objectives

Objective 1: To Increase Hispanic Enrollment.

Hispanic parents were generally unaware of the choice options available for their children. Although many had read the Spanish-language brochures mailed to their homes, the brochures were written in vague terms and Hispanic parents were reticent about calling the district central office or school to find out more about getting their children enrolled. Hispanic community leaders informed the consultants that many Hispanic parents felt uncomfortable in actively seeking information from the district.

Recommendations:

The marketing consultants recommended improving the quality of translations in the written material to Hispanic parents. Moreover, they recommended an approach stressing direct personal contact using parent and student volunteers to initiate phone contacts and make home visits. Posters in Spanish were distributed to grocery stores in the Hispanic community, youth centers, and meeting sites for Hispanic community organizations.

Objective 2: To Increase White Enrollment.

Parents who sent their children to private or parochial schools said they did so because they believed that private schools offered better discipline, smaller classes, extended child care, religious instruction, and more concern for individual students.

Recommendations:

The marketing consultants and ex-private school parents recommended sending a special cover letter along with the general magnet brochures to parents of private school children emphasizing the features of the magnet program which drew the parents to private school: better discipline, small class size, individualized attention, caring teachers, and extended child care.

Objective 3: To Increase the Number of Lower Achieving Black Students Enrolling in Magnets

Lower achieving black students felt that magnet schools were for "smart" kids only.

Recommendations:

The marketing consultants recommended peer recruitment along with extra assistance from youth advocacy groups to reach low-achieving black students. Visits by the magnet recruiter to compensatory program classrooms in targeted non-magnet schools, home visits and personal contact with parents at community centers were also recommended.

The marketing firm also supplied the school district with a media list that was specifically prepared to reach the three unique target groups that the district was especially interested in contacting. The marketing agency also had a good mail-broker department which was able to identify a target mailing down to one city block within a zip code area. With all this information, the district designed and implemented its information dissemination strategies as described below.

Information Dissemination/Recruitment Timeline

Although information dissemination is conducted on a year-round basis, major dissemination activities occurred during a specific 6-8 week period -- early March-April 30. The target date for submission of enrollment applications was May 1st.

A. Phase I - Preliminary Publicity (Early March)

1. Two general press releases to print media. The first describes choice options of magnets in attractive, general terms; the second gives more specific details.

2. All printed materials ready to distribute (posters, flyers, brochures, applications); Speakers Bureau volunteers ready and all special mailings prepared.

B. Phase Two of Information Dissemination (Mid-March)

1. Television - Magnet Project Director appears on local talk shows.

2. Radio - Magnet Project Director discusses magnet programs on local talk shows.

C. Phase Three - Countdown Period (April, 4 weeks to target date)

1. Four press releases - one per week (emphasis on special target group audiences in special interest press) [April 1-30]

2. Public service announcements [April 1-15]

3. Radio and television appearances of magnet site staff and students (target programs that have been identified for special target audiences) [April 1-20]

4. Activate mailings, distribute posters, brochures [April 2]

5. Activate Speakers Bureau - speakers at community meetings, clubs, parent groups, etc. [April 10-30]

6. Hold "open houses" at magnet sites [April 15-22]

7. Magnet school recruiters visit schools, make home visits [April 15-22]

8. Activate parent-to-parent telephone recruitment [April 15-30]

9. Implement final television, radio, newspaper ads, submit application deadline dates in calendar of events publications [April 25-30]

THE ROLE OF BUILDING-BASED STAFF IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

When reviewing the model for effective information dissemination strategies presented on the preceding pages, it might appear that an important component of the recruitment strategy identified has been underemphasized: the role of teachers, counselors, and paraprofessionals. The research literature and magnet school practitioners agree that the involvement of these staff members is important to the success of the recruitment plan and, in fact, most magnet school recruitment plans identify teachers and counselors as key players in influencing students' awareness of their options.

Why were these key people, then, not relied upon more heavily as part of the effective information dissemination strategy since all agree that their influence is critical? The reason is that not all school-based staff are enthusiastic supporters of magnet school programs, as found by most practitioners with experience in implementing magnet programs.

A great deal of controversy has emerged over the issue of school choice and education vouchers as tools of choice, and most of the arguments for or against vouchers use magnet schools as the current example of a choice program in the public schools. For example, the president of the National Education Association (NEA), Mary Hatwood Futrell, explains that NEA is wary of the current focus on choice because of its implications for equal educational opportunity for all students. Futrell cites the following criticism of magnets: "Two classes of school may be created: one on a fast track to improvement, the other to neglect and decline (Futrell, 1986)." The common concern most magnet staff hear is that they (the magnets) are "creaming" the best students from the comprehensive schools and leaving those schools with the highest concentration of disadvantaged, unmotivated students. While there is not yet conclusive evidence to indicate that this is actually happening, the fact that comprehensive school staff perceive that it is happening or will happen is a significant problem for magnet school recruiters.

It is specifically because of this problem that many magnet program recruiters cannot always rely on the staff of comprehensive schools to encourage students to become aware of their choices outside the comprehensive school. In fact, in conversations with the researchers, some practitioners have cited instances where counselors fail to mention magnets as a choice to some students and actually discourage others.

This particular problem appears to diminish as the magnet schools become well-established and no longer need to rely on information dissemination strategies to make choosers aware, yet it can still remain an obstacle, particularly for the passive chooser. In an ideal situation, teachers and counselors can be extremely effective vehicles for providing students with awareness of their choices, but a district must be sensitive to potential problems in this approach during its earliest stages of magnet program implementation.

One of the ways magnet school planners and implementers can begin to minimize the perception that they are "skimming" the best students is to design their recruitment and informational materials so that the message is clear to choosers that a variety of programs are offered to all learners. Examination of recruitment and promotional materials from forty MSAP-funded districts suggests that the message of choice is often misinterpreted as choice of the best school in general, rather than choice of a specific program which is best suited to the individual learner. In other words, magnets should avoid using the competitive approach which pits schools against one another and instead focus on the diversity of choice available to all learners.

CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION TO MAGNET SCHOOLS

A critical factor in dissemination and recruitment is the criteria for admission to magnet programs and the implications of these requirements for the tenet of equal access.

Admission criteria at magnets range anywhere from "interest" to strict adherence to test scores and past academic records. Although supportive data are not conclusive in this area, all of the respondents to the researchers' survey of magnet administrators employed a variety of criteria within their

individual systems of magnet programs which ranged from interest to ability criteria (as in Blank, et al, 1983 national study).

MSAP survey results indicated that the most commonly used selection criteria are:

1. Racial balance
2. Academic ability (test scores, grades)
3. Ability in curricular area of magnet
4. Location of residence
5. Interest

Other less commonly used criteria include:

1. Teacher recommendation
2. Student behavior (attendance, suspension)
3. Motivation
4. First-come basis
5. Lottery

A two-year national study (Blank, 1983) found that of 45 magnet schools examined, 17 emphasized general academics, 10 had an arts theme, 3 used a science theme, 3 had career/vocational themes, and 2 specialized in social studies. Of these 45 schools, only 13% had highly selective admission criteria. In the MSAP Survey, while 90% used some selective admission requirement other than "interest" in at least one of their magnet programs, the survey did not define selectivity as precisely as in the Blank study.

Critics of selective admissions policies argue that the less able student may be denied access to the very opportunity he or she needs to become more successful in school. Supporters of admission criteria argue that some programs are not designed for <u>all</u> students; in fact, that is what makes them unique. They believe it is unfair to a student to be enrolled in a program in

which he/she is not equipped to succeed, such as students who enter a math/science magnet with significantly deficient basic math skills. Even those magnets where student interest is used as a criterion have been known to reject a student because the required interest essay indicated a lack of genuine interest in the theme of the magnet.

Given one of the basic objectives of magnet programs in general, which is to reduce racial isolation and eliminate minority group discrimination, it is imperative that the magnet school admission policy be designed not to exclude, reject, or deny those students who are actively seeking admittance. Proponents of "interest only" admissions requirements believe that selection criteria based on ability or other highly selective variables will lead to further resegregation by race. If racial balance, however, is the overriding factor in the selection (which it <u>is</u> in MSAP-funded programs) then, theoretically, racial resegregation trends can be monitored and avoided; yet, segregation by ability is almost inevitable, particularly when the selection criteria is rigid. The evidence is clear, however, that ability grouping practices do tend to segregate students by race <u>and</u> socio-economic status. Therefore, even if the overall racial balance of a magnet school population can be controlled, ability grouping can lead to segregation of classrooms within a magnet school. Studies show that this kind of assignment practice does not improve achievement for low-ability or high-ability groups, and further that it actually can negatively impact the self-esteem and achievement of the low-ability student (Oakes, 1962, 1987).

The task of providing equitable choices through magnet programs for a diverse group of students without further resegregating students by race, class, or ability, must be addressed not simply through the magnet admission criteria policy, but must also be addressed during the initial stages of

developing magnet schools programs. Since part of the legislative intent behind magnet schools has been to offer opportunities to those students who have historically been part of a group that has not had equal access to educational and career opportunities, it does seem ironic that the most common types of magnets implemented are those for the academically talented. -This is not to suggest that these magnets should be eliminated. These programs appear to be successful in attracting white students to predominantly black schools. When designing an overall magnet schools plan, however, districts need to ensure that great care is taken to offer diverse magnet programs that are accessible and beneficial to all students. Creating new options for poor children, low-achievers, and minorities is the current challenge of magnet school program planners, and there are a number of creative ways to accomplish this goal. While it is not the intent of this research to recommend how to design these kinds of magnets, there are some implications which relate directly to admission criteria, because if magnets are to offer students "a better chance" but refuse entrance to some of them, then where is the choice?

Many educators believe that some form of selection criteria is necessary, particularly when an individual magnet has many more applicants than spaces available. To address this problem, some districts have implemented the "first-come, first-admitted" approach. The weakness in this model for providing equity is that better educated parents have more accurate information regarding choice options and will be the first to enroll their children. In Pittsburgh, where this approach has been used to an extreme, parents have had to "camp out" in lines for up to two days in order to enroll their children. Children of single and working parents are definitely at a disadvantage in this situation because parents cannot afford to stand in line for a day or two.

Thus, it is difficult for magnet schools to offer equal opportunity with this approach to admission.

When available space is not an issue in the earlier stages of magnet development, magnets need not rely exclusively upon setting up rules in advance, but rather they should have a flexible admissions policy which can be adjusted to the needs of the population as the magnet program develops (Glenn, 1984). In this situation, a placement coordinator would be responsible for overseeing and monitoring the selection process to ensure that student selection and placement is fair and equitable. An outside parent/community-based group could provide a similar function.

A review of the admission criteria and policies of magnet programs across the nation indicates that any criteria used in admitting students to magnets can present problems regarding the issue of equal access. The lottery approach does appear to have the fewest obstacles in terms of equal access. Its proponents agree that if implemented carefully students can still be placed in a magnet of their choice, albeit not necessarily their first choice. Some districts have used computers to accomplish this by collecting family choices and matching these with data on race and capacity of schools. While there still may be some students who are denied admission to the magnet of their first or second choices, this approach eliminates discrimination against any single group and all students have an equal opportunity for admission regardless of ability, race, or class.

CONCLUSION

After examining recruitment materials and other data from school districts across the United States it becomes clear that each district is a unique system in terms of its desegregation goals and it is therefore essential that each district carefully plan its magnet school program with-specific recruitment goals in mind.

Too often a school district will decide to implement a magnet school which will draw a certain population and then will encounter equity problems in its admission policy later in the process. For example, after an initial decision has been made to establish a magnet school for academically gifted students, it is very difficult to address the issue of equal access. During the planning stages of magnet school development, enrollment goals should be established with an understanding of the long-term impact of program emphasis on recruitment. A broader understanding concerning the ways in which magnet schools can eliminate the exclusionary barriers to equal opportunities for students would be helpful to magnet school planners and would reduce subsequent problems of equal access in magnet school programs.

The data presented in this paper reveal what current MSAP implementers believe are effective information dissemination and recruitment strategies, yet the data also suggests that the area warrants further scrutiny. As magnet schools proliferate we need to examine: the influence of peers on choice; the influence of parents on choices for older students; the ability of school districts to target recruitment strategies to students; equity issues for magnets vs. comprehensive schools; the issue of elitism in magnets; and, the role of information dissemination/recruitment for active vs. passive choosers.

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APPENDIX

Methodology

A questionnaire was completed by magnet school representatives from 56 school districts. The questionnaire focused on the magnet school recruitment process and information dissemination strategies. Responses yielded information on school district size, the racial composition of the student population of each district, as well as data about recruitment and information dissemination strategies. The following list shows the school districts that identified themselves when completing the survey, although some school districts did not complete the optional item of school identification. Of the 56 surveys completed, 37 identified the district being represented.

It should be noted that when asked to identify the most effective information dissemination strategies used in their district, respondents were providing answers based on experience and perceptions rather than on objective measures.

The completed questionnaires were coded and analyzed in November, 1986. There were a number of non-responses for some items which subjects felt inadequately informed about but these frequencies were factored out in the final analysis.

Questionnaire data were supplemented with copies of recruitment materials from 23 MSAP applicants. These printed materials were examined by the investigators as part of the research design for this paper.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN SURVEY SAMPLE

Lawson, Okla.
Peoria, Ill.
Fort Worth, Tex.
Phoenix, Ariz.
San Bernadino, Calif.
Flint, Mich.
Rochester, N.Y.
Overland, Kans.
Jackson, Miss.
Richmond, Va.
Kansas City, Mo.
Miami, Fla.
Cincinatti, OH
Los Angeles, Calif.
Milwaukee, Wis.
Memphis, Tenn.
Atlanta, Ga.
Denver, Colo.
Detroit, Mich.

Buffalo, N.Y.
Long Beach, Calif.
Dallas, Tex.
Tulsa, Okla.
Nashville, OH
Indianapolis, Ind.
New Orleans, La.
Baton Rouge, La.
Weehawken, N.J.
Trenton, N.J.
Montclair, N.J.
Jersey City, N.J.
Newburgh, N.Y.
Little Rock, Ark.
Bayonne, N.J.
Silver Springs, Md.
Philadelphia, Pa.
Montgomery, Ala.
Chicago, Ill.